

**Sperrvermerk bis 17.04.2011, 14 Uhr,
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort.**

Speech by Romani Rose on the 66th anniversary of the liberation of Buchenwald

Dear President, dear Bertrand Herz,
dear Professor Knigge, dear friends,
Ladies and Gentleman,

In particular I welcome the survivors who are amongst us today. I am also very happy that the chairman of our Rhineland-Palatine regional association, Jacques Delfeld, is present here. The obligation resulting from the experience of the national socialist crimes against humanity has since long ago become the foundation of our political culture and our European self-conception. This includes the understanding that, 66 years ago, not only those few surviving victims of the concentration camp were liberated, but the German Society as a whole: liberated from a murderous and inhuman ideology the victims of which 500,000 Sinti and Romanies and 6 million Jews became and which plummeted the entire continent of Europe into the abyss.

Out of the knowledge of the barbarism committed in the name of Germany not only the obligation to remember all the victims of the Nazi dictatorship has grown but also the acceptance of responsibility for the present. This is not a German task alone, but a pan-European, if racism and discrimination shall be sustainably prevented in the future. Meanwhile the perception has prevailed that today's free democracy– the accomplishments which we can be rightly proud of – is consolidated by facing history and by the awareness of its precipices.

It certainly is a heavy burden that the voices of the contemporary witnesses gradually fall silent. All the more we must win over the hearts and the brains of the young people for democratic values and human rights. In order to raise young people in civil courage we need examples from history serving as role models: courageous men and women who, despite the risks for themselves and their families, did not close their eyes but actively resisted injustice. Also members of our minority owe their survival to such people with conscience, walking tall, who stood up for the victims of the persecution. Among these is the Dutch Sinto Zoni Weisz, who was eight years of age when he was rescued from the deportation to Auschwitz by a policeman, a member of the Dutch resistance movement. Zoni Weisz was the only member of his family to survive the Holocaust. I deem it a historic break that he was the first representative of our minority to give the commemorative address at the German Bundestag on the 27th of January this year.

It is my hope, that a signal will go from this hour of commemoration at the German Bundestag to politics and society, to science, to the media, but also to the memorial places in order to even more deeply embed in the public awareness, in particular within the public policy of remembrance, the genocide of the Sinti and Romanies. All too often we had to experience that the suffering of our people at best was mentioned on the sidelines of official commemoration ceremonies. The continuity of racist bogeyman images and distorted ideas concerning our minority is very essentially founded in this blind spot of historic reminiscence.

In the recent past, all over Europe, we have not only been experiencing an increase in extreme right wing parties and groupings, but also a dramatic increase of racially motivated assaults. According to enquiries of the weekly newspaper „DIE ZEIT“ and the Berliner Tagesspiegel at least 137 people have become victims of right-wing violence in Germany since 1990 - a truly frightening figure.

In many European states the Sinti and Romanies belonged to the preferred target groups of racially motivated acts of violence. Even representatives of common established parties in some countries do not shy away from picking from the collection of deeply rooted clichés and distorted ideas of antiziganism in a populist manner in order to go vote catching. This adding of fuel to prejudices for the sake of the own political advantage paves the way into the middle of society for organised right-wing extremism and its racist ideology. Having grown by the crisis of the economy and by the search for scapegoats, a social climate has been generated which makes the threshold for acts of violence lower and lower.

The dastard racist murders of eleven Hungarian Romanies by neo-Nazis since 2008, which do not even shy back from murdering a five year old child and the child's father, shape, in their brutality and

unscrupulousness, a new dimension of violence against our minority. The case against four suspects who have been made responsible for a total of six murders commenced at the District Court Pest three weeks ago; the judgement is expected to be rendered later this year. The Central Council of German Sinti and Romanies will closely observe the proceedings together with the Hungarian Romany organisation.

In talks with the Hungarian government, but also with government representatives of other states, we have been pleading for many years that the politically responsible persons unambiguously condemn any form of racism and particularly draw a clear line between themselves and extreme right-wing parties and organisations. Developments such as those currently happening in Hungary, where extreme right-wing organisations and parties organise paramilitary deployments in order to massively and menacingly act against the Romanies living there, are extremely alarming.

At some locations members of the extreme right-wing party "Jobbik" and associated guards literally seal off quarters inhabited by Romanies. Being scared, Romany families hardly leave their houses, children cannot attend school any more. Mayors and urban administrations frequently do not do anything against this deployment of right-wing extremists - the monopoly of the Hungarian state on the legitimate use of physical force is regularly annulled by "Jobbik" and the guards. I thus requested the Hungarian Minister of the interior to guarantee the protection of the Romany minority in Hungary and to ban the extreme rightist guards who are in the tradition of the fascist Arrow Cross Party. This includes the ban of racist propaganda in the Internet.

Similar performances of extremist right-wing organisations have been reported from a number of other member states of the European Union such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Rumania or Bulgaria.

Also in Germany, namely in Trier, just over a week ago, young neo-Nazis committed assaults in a residential area inhabited by many Sinti. Shouting Nazi slogans, they threw bottles at the residents and at parked cars out of a moving vehicle. The state is called to determinedly stop such targeted provocations, in order to prevent a threatening escalation of violence from the start.

The community of states must be absolutely clearly committed to fighting this degrading of the rule of law and of democratic culture and committed to developing cross-border measures of fighting organised and violence-prone right-wing extremism.

The situation for the Sinti and Romanies is furthermore threatened by a racist policy of ostracism, which is pushed by the state in more and more countries such as lastly by the legislative initiative in Romania, by which the minority there – thus violating the corresponding European standards – shall be interdicted to use the self-identification as Romanies in order to replace it by the pejorative identification as „Gypsies“. Such a deprivation of rights and discrimination aims at excluding the minority from national responsibility; yes, it finally aims at expulsion.

After all, it is an encouraging signal that, last summer, the European Commission for the first time directly reacted to the discrimination and stigmatization and insisted on the French government implementing European law. Not only renowned artists and intellectuals, but many thousands of French citizens protested against the unlawful deportation and the stigmatisation of Romanies. This example impressively shows the importance of a critical public based on the commitment of many individuals.

Human rights and the rights of minorities are indivisible. Sinti and Romanies have been residents of the countries of Europe for centuries, they are an integral part of European history and culture. Discrimination, racist motivated propaganda and violence towards Sinti and Romanies must be as consequently outlawed by the politically responsible persons and the European institutions as the various manifestations of anti-Semitism. This is the lesson Buchenwald and all the other sites of Nazi terror stand for.

Thank you very much.